

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE WORLD SWIMMING CHAMPIONSHIPS
HELD IN ROME ORGANIZED BY THE
INTERNATIONAL SWIMMING FEDERATION (FINA)***

*Courtyard of the Papal Summer Residence, Castel Gandolfo
Saturday, 1st August 2009*

Dear Friends,

I accepted with deep pleasure the invitation to meet you on the occasion of the World Swimming Championships. Thank you for your appreciated visit; I gladly offer my cordial welcome to each and every one of you! I address a respectful thought first of all to Mr Julio Maglione, President of the International Swimming Federation (FINA), and to the Hon. Mr Paolo Barelli, President of the Italian Swimming Federation (FIN), while I also thank them for their kind words on behalf of all.

I greet the Authorities present, the directors and those in charge, the technicians, delegates, journalists and mass media operators, the volunteers, the organizers and all who have contributed to putting on this world sports event. I extend my most affectionate greeting specially to you, dear athletes of various nationalities who are competing in these World Swimming Championships. With your competitions you offer the world a fascinating spectacle of discipline and humanity, of artistic beauty and tenacious determination. You show what goals the vitality of youth can achieve when young people submit to the effort of a demanding training and are willing to accept numerous sacrifices and deprivations. All this is also an important lesson for life for your peers.

As has just been recalled, sports, practised with enthusiasm and an acute ethical sense, especially for youth become a training ground of healthy competition and physical improvement, a school of formation in the human and spiritual values, a privileged means for personal growth and contact with society. Watching these swimming championships and admiring the results achieved make it easy to understand the great potential with which God has endowed the human body and the interesting objectives of perfection it is able to achieve. One then thinks of the Psalmist's wonder who in contemplating the universe, praises the glory of God and the greatness of man: "when I behold your heavens", we read in Psalm 8, "the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have set in place what is man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you care for him?" (vv. 3-4). Then, how can one fail to thank the Lord for having endowed the human body with such perfection; for having enriched it with a beauty and harmony that can be expressed in so many ways?

The sports disciplines, each in a different way, help us to appreciate this gift which God has made to us. The Church follows and encourages sport, practised not as an end in

itself, but as a means, as a precious instrument for the perfection and balance of the whole person. In the Bible we also find interesting references to sport as an image of life. For example, the Apostle Paul, considered sports an authentic human value and used them not only as a metaphor to illustrate lofty ethical and ascetic ideals but also as a means for human formation and as an element of human culture and civilization.

Dear athletes, you are models for your peers, and your example can be crucial to them in building their future positively. So be champions in sports and in life! John Paul II who was mentioned earlier, met representatives of the world of sports in October of the Jubilee Year 2000. He stressed the great importance of practising sport, precisely since "it can encourage young people to develop important values such as loyalty, perseverance, friendship, sharing and solidarity". Furthermore, sports events like yours, thanks to the modern means of social communication, have a considerable impact on public opinion, given that the language of sports is universal and reaches out in particular to the young generations. Therefore, the use of sport as a vehicle for positive messages contributes to building a more fraternal world with greater solidarity.

Dear French-speaking athlete friends, I am happy to receive you and to offer you a cordial greeting on the occasion of the World Swimming Championships. The sport you practise is a school of generosity, loyalty and respect for others. May it encourage the development of the values of friendship and sharing between people and among peoples. May God bless you!

I am pleased to greet the English-speaking athletes taking part in the International Swimming Federation World Championships, together with the many officials, support staff, volunteers and friends who have joined you here in Rome during these days. May your pursuit of excellence be accompanied by gratitude for your God-given gifts and a desire to help others to use their own gifts in building a better and more united world. Upon you and your families I invoke God's Blessings of joy and peace.

I warmly greet the German-speaking participants in the World Swimming Championships here in Rome. Dear friends, as sports competitors you offer performances of a very high-standard and are an example for many young people. Be committed to all that is good and lasting in the world in which you live, so that sport may serve to develop the gifts that God has made to humankind. May the Lord bless you as you journey onwards.

I cordially greet all the Spanish-speaking people present here: athletes, directors and all who have taken part in various ways in the World Swimming Championships. I ask you to continue to practice your sport in harmony with the highest human values, so that it may encourage the healthy physical development of those who practise it and thereby set an example to children and young people for their integral formation. Thank you.

Dear Portuguese-speaking friends who are taking part in these World Swimming Championships. I warmly greet you all and take this opportunity to thank you for the lesson of life that you offer to the world, consisting of discipline and humanity, of

artistic beauty and of a strong determination to win and, especially, to get the better of yourselves. I invoke God's help upon you and upon your families, as I impart to you the Apostolic Blessing.

Dear friends, and especially you, dear athletes, as I thank you once again for this cordial meeting, I express the hope that you will "swim" towards ever more incomparable ideals.

I assure you of my remembrance in prayer and, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, I invoke God's Blessing upon you, upon your families and upon all your loved ones.

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